December 2017

Carolina Country

A Holiday Tradition

page 10

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PERIODICAL

Your Touchstone Energy® Cooperative

Have you seen the 'sticker car'?

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Meet Eddie Nickens, outdoorsman extraordinaire

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Ductless heat pumps can heat and cool on a budget—page 36

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On the Cover

Sisters Jeanne Leonard (left), Leigh Foster, and Beth Dean (not pictured) own The Candy Factory on Main Street in Lexington. Read more about their family's candy legacy on page 10. Photo by Don McKenzie.

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North Carolina's electric cooperatives provide reliable, safe and affordable electric service to nearly 900,000 homes and businesses. The 26 electric cooperatives are each member-owned, not-for-profit and overseen by a board of directors elected by the membership.

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Your cooperative sends you Carolina Country as a convenient, economical way to share with its members information about services, director elections, meetings and management decisions. The magazine also carries legal notices that otherwise would be published in other media at greater cost.

Your co-op's board of directors authorizes a subscription to Carolina Country on behalf of the membership at a cost of less than $5 per year.

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Giving Back to the Communities We Serve

By Morris McClelion

North Carolina's electric cooperatives are as local and community centered as they come. Founded as a way to bring electricity to unserved communities, our state's electric co-ops have been a cornerstone of community development since their creation. Being a member of an electric cooperative is more than just knowing there are people out there to bring you safe, reliable and affordable electric service. Living on co-op lines is an investment in your community and its members.

Since we are not-for-profit and owned by the members we serve, electric cooperatives have a strong commitment to our local communities. It is even one of our seven guiding principles. We take that commitment very seriously, seeking ways to invest resources directly back into our communities.

One resource electric co-ops across the state utilize is the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Economic Development Loan & Grant (REDLG) program, which provides rural utilities with grants and zero-interest loans to directly fund local projects that create and retain employment in the communities they serve. North Carolina's electric cooperatives lead the nation in investments through the REDLG program. In the past five years alone, electric co-ops have tapped the funding source to channel more than $50 million to projects across the state, supporting the creation of more than 2,500 jobs.

At Central Electric, we have provided REDLG funding for two primary economic development vehicles: water improvements for the town of Pittsboro and expansion at the Raleigh Executive Jetport in Lee County. We also are currently in the process of obtaining funds for a third REDLG loan to help a local fire station purchase a new engine.

Electric co-ops also use a variety of volunteer programs to channel resources to those members in need. Through Central Electric's Operation Round Up® program, for example, our members have generously invested more than $400,000 back into the community by simply "rounding up" their electric bill to the next dollar each month. Organizations including the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, The Salvation Army and Habitat for Humanity have received funding to help provide opportunities for individuals and projects throughout our community that otherwise may have not been possible.

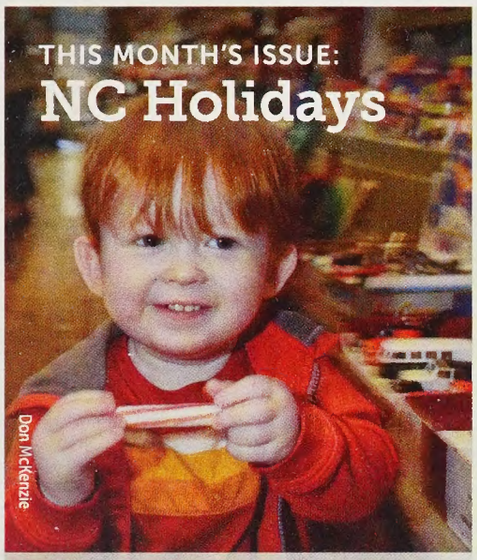
We also heavily invest in the development of our youth through scholarships and initiatives such as the Bright Ideas grant program, which is powered by each of North Carolina's 26 electric cooperatives to support teachers and students across our great state. Since the program's inception in 1994, electric co-ops have collectively awarded more than $10.9 million in grants to fund innovative classroom projects. This year, Central Electric awarded $15,000 in Bright Ideas grants to local teachers. The funds will positively impact more than 3,800 students in our community.

These types of programs are what truly define the essence of electric cooperatives.

So the next time you think about your co-op membership, remember, you are investing in your community. You are helping to create jobs through economic development opportunities, provide scholarships to well-deserving students, and empower teachers to provide educational opportunities for youth.

Take pride in the importance of your co-op membership.

Morris McClelion is chief executive officer and general manager at Central Electric Membership Corporation in Sanford.



Camdyn Mizelle explores The Candy Factory (see page 10).

You've got to love this time of year. What really makes it special are the traditions that can hold so much meaning for us all. Traditions like driving around town to see the lights (going slow past the house that went all-out). Pulling extra chairs around the table for that big family meal. Baking the same, sought-after cookies year after year. Food can play a big part in our traditions, and in this issue we're highlighting a few local foods that help keep the season bright.

—Scott Gates, editor

Krispy Kreme Correction

Any story about North Carolina food superstars must include Krispy Kreme, of course ("NC in the Kitchen," November 2017, page 15). One sentence in your story caught my attention, though—it read, in part: "except for the original 'hole,' the first retail location didn't open until decades later in 1989, in Greensboro."

Egads! I don't know when the first retail store opened, but by the late 1950's there was a store in Roanoke, Virginia. Going there was always a highlight when we visited my cousins in town. In the 60's I was living near Asheville, and the Krispy Kreme store on Tunnel Road there was always busy. The Greensboro store that opened in 1989 was the first "retail only" store. They sold the doughnuts there but made them elsewhere. That's a big distinction.

Krispy Kreme DOUGHNUTS®

It's hard to imagine growing up in the south without visiting a Krispy Kreme retail store, where you could watch as the doughnuts were being made. What joy!

Karen Austin, Nebo, a member of Rutherford EMC

Editor's Note: My goodness. We did, indeed, miss that important distinction in our Krispy Kreme history, but we appreciate those readers who wrote in to set us straight (and share a bit of their own history with the beloved doughnut shop). The chain had grown to 60 locations across the Southeast by the early 1970s. Several of those spots lured passersby in with a "hot doughnuts" sign, which was trademarked as a brand icon in 1992.

Other corrections to our November issue

Our Carolina Music featured track (page 33) came from Joe Newberry and Jon Shain, not Swain. Jon's website was listed correctly (jonshain.com).

In the Apple Pie with Cream Cheese Topping recipe (page 42), an important ingredient was omitted—cream cheese! Use one 8-ounce carton for the topping. Thank you to our readers who wrote in about this.

Industry Insider

Hello Carolina Country, I just wanted to let ya'll know how much I love reading your magazine! I am not a member of an electric co-op in North Carolina, but I am a lineman for an electric utility in North Carolina, and I absolutely love reading your magazine and all the great stories and history and photos that are found on the inside.

I absolutely love reading all the old stories and old memories from back in the day when electricity was first making its way to backwoods rural North Carolina. I love my job as a lineman and take pride in doing the work that I do, and I love reading all the information about the electrical system and how it works that you provide to your members in Carolina Country. My uncle has a house at Holden Beach and is a Brunswick EMC member, and I look forward to reading Carolina Country every time I get to go to his home! Just wanted to show some appreciation for the magazine and the laid back, kind, country feeling it and all of North Carolina's electric co-ops show to the people of NC! So keep on doing what you're doing, because I know it sure is a blessing to me.

Michael Everett, Lakeview

In Good Company

My mother got a subscription to Reader's Digest for me when I was 18 and she renews it every year. I don't want to say how many years ago that was but it still excites me to see that in the mailbox every month. That and Carolina Country.

I love to read books, of course, but these two magazines are the only ones I still read. I don't even read the newspaper anymore (who does?) so keep up the good work! Carolina Country has interesting stories, pictures and helpful information consistently.

Tammy Braswell, Sanford, a member of Central EMC

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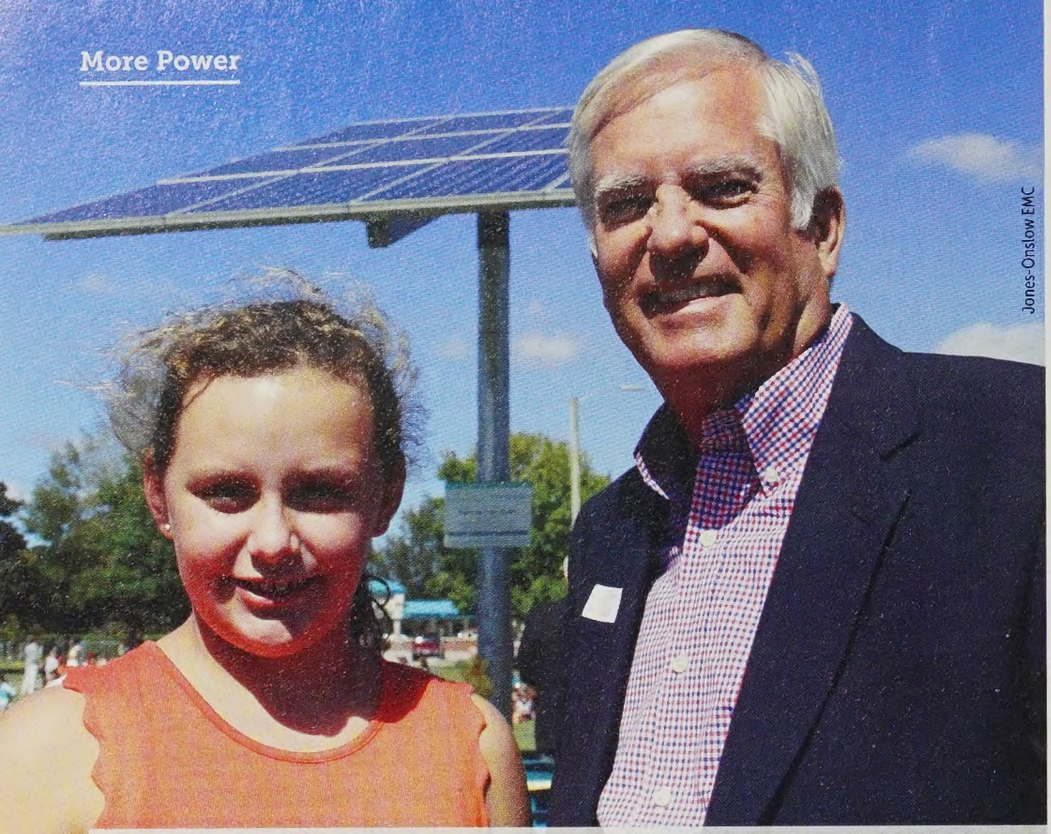

Jones-Onslow EMC

Jones-Onslow EMC CEO Jeff Clark with Queens Creek Elementary student representative Maggie Milbery at the ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Jones-Onslow EMC Supports Solar School

Queens Creek Elementary School in Onslow County recently unveiled a new 5-kW PV solar installation, provided through an NC GreenPower grant program. Funding for the panels was provided by NC GreenPower, the State Employees' Credit Union, Jacksonville-based Jones-Onslow EMC, Cypress Creek Renewables, and donations from school staff and families.

It is the eighth installation funded through the NC GreenPower Solar School program and the first on electric co-op lines. The school installation includes a weather station, real-time monitoring, an associated curriculum and training for teachers.

"These panels represent more than just producing some renewable electricity—they represent the beginning of the future in our industry and in your world," Jones-Onslow EMC CEO Jeff Clark told students at the ribbon-cutting ceremony. "We've all heard the old adage about a journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step. We are taking that step today. And all along this journey, we will be creating a brighter future for all of us and those who come behind us."

Queens Creek Elementary School has been an NC Green School of Excellence since 2014, an honor that recognizes K–12 schools in the state dedicated to sustainability.

"We are so excited to be bringing this wonderful opportunity to our school, community and students," said Queens Creek Principal Elaine Justice. "Not only will we be modeling good stewardship, but our students will also use the solar array to enhance their math and science curriculum."

Major components of the roughly $40,000 pole-mounted solar system include 12 SunPower solar modules provided by NC GreenPower, interactive inverters, and an internet monitoring system that provides students with solar irradiation, ambient air temperature, module temperature and other data.

The grid-tied array is estimated to produce about 6,570 kWh each year, with a potential cost savings to the school of $657 annually. The panels will provide power to the school library and cafeteria.

The Raleigh-based NC GreenPower (ncgreenpower.com) is administered by Advanced Energy, a nonprofit that focuses on energy efficiency for residential, commercial and industrial markets, and electric transportation.

Bronze-Age Energy Storage Option

With everything from supersized batteries and molten salt to biomimicry and underwater balloons being studied as energy storage solutions, a team at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is working to breathe life into a 15th-century-B.C. technology originally developed for metal-smelting kilns. With a few modern tweaks, firebricks—first used by the Hittites—could be employed to help make intermittent renewable energy resources more economical.

Firebrick Resistance-heated Energy Storage, or FIRES, "charges" when off-peak electricity warms a mass of ceramic blocks. The thermal energy can then be put to later use.

"While the process for converting the firebricks' thermal energy back into electricity is something of a hurdle, it's not a dead-end," said MIT Research Scientist Charles Forsberg.

Forsberg argues that because firebricks contain excellent heat retention properties, they could effectively "warehouse" electricity generated by wind turbines or solar arrays long after the wind has ceased blowing and the sun has set. The technology also shows promise in manufacturing processes.

"In the U.S. and most other countries, demand for industrial heat actually outpaces that for electricity," Forsberg notes. "Firebrick heat could be used to drive processes at facilities such as refineries or manufacturing plants."

—Perry Stambaugh, National Rural Utilities Cooperative Finance Corporation

Choctawhatchee Electric Cooperative employees work to restore power in Florida following Hurricane Irma.

Garrett Hubbaard for NRECA

NC Co-ops and Employees Donate for Disaster Recovery

The Seven Cooperative Principles—especially those of "cooperation among cooperatives" and "concern for community"—guide electric cooperatives' response in times of need. But did you know that cooperatives' response goes beyond sending line crews to impacted areas?

North Carolina's electric cooperatives and their employees have contributed $11,790 this year through the cooperatives' Human Connections Fund, which allows electric co-ops to work together to support members and communities in areas impacted by natural disasters and other unforeseen events.

This year, the fund supported cooperative members and residents on North Carolina's Outer Banks after a bridge construction accident severed electric service to Hatteras and Ocracoke islands in July. Contributions also were sent to Florida and Texas after historic hurricanes Harvey and Irma caused widespread destruction and flooding in cooperative territories.

"In North Carolina, we are all too familiar with the devastation and destruction that major storms can bring," said Nelle Hotchkiss, senior vice president for corporate relations for North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives. "We believe in the cooperative difference and the power of human connections, and we are proud to support sister cooperatives and their members, here and across the nation, as they recover and rebuild."

—Lindsey Listrom, North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives

Pictured (left to right): North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives Director of Government Affairs Jay Rouse; NRECA Senior Legislative Affairs Director Chris Stephens; Rep. Foxx; Surry-Yadkin EMC Manager of Public Relations Adam Martin; and Surry-Yadkin EMC Vice President of Administration Donna Marion.

U.S. Rep. Foxx Meets with Co-op Leaders

U.S. Rep. Virginia Foxx of North Carolina's 5th District recently met with representatives from Surry-Yadkin EMC, North Carolina's Electric Cooperatives and the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA) at her district office in Clemmons. The group discussed legislative topics important to the co-op, its employees and its members, including electric co-op efforts to attract and retain a skilled workforce, and access to healthcare in rural areas.

The Evolution of Holiday Lighting

New LED options cut long-term costs

By Derrill Holly

Thomas Edison displayed the first strand of electric Christmas lights in 1880 outside his Menlo Park, New Jersey, laboratory. Two years later, his partner, Edward H. Johnson, hand-wired 80 red, white and blue bulbs together and wrapped them around his Christmas tree, mounted on a revolving motorized stand.

For more than a century, incandescent bulbs dominated holiday lighting. Miniature incandescent lights made their first appearances in the late 1960s and quickly became the go-to choice for holiday lighting as costs declined. But today, light-emitting diodes (LEDs) have caught on with consumers as a viable, efficient option for decking the halls during the holidays.

"LED lighting products now account for 60 percent of the holiday and seasonal lighting sold in the United States each year," said Robert S. La Rocca, business development manager from the wire and cable/seasonal lighting division of Underwriters Laboratories.

Seasonal decorations are a $12 billion annual market, which now includes consumer lighting, ornaments, inflatables, artificial trees and table or mantle displays. LEDs are enticing consumers to buy more, and go bigger and brighter, even as they use far less energy.

"A typical 50-lamp incandescent light set can operate up to 0.170 amps or 20.4 watts. Based on this, and the requirements of the previous version of the Standard for Safety of Seasonal and Holiday Decorative Products, known in the industry as UL 588, you could only connect three strings end-to-end. This was incredibly limiting," said La Rocca. "Now, however, with the current version of UL 588, allowing connection of up to 216 watts end-to-end, and a 50 lamp LED light set that typically operates at approx. 0.020 amps or 2.4 watts, you can technically connect more than 50 strings together."

La Rocca added that consumers should always check the caution markings attached to the strings and follow the provided instruction manual, which advises the user how many strings to connect together.

More efficient

A 1,000-bulb string of incandescent miniatures consumes about 408 watts of energy compared to an equal LED string's 48 watts. Since most residential circuits operate at a maximum load of 15 to 20 amps, up to three outlets might be needed for the incandescent strings to prevent overload, while the LEDs would use a single outlet.

"A consumer can connect up to 25 strings of LED mini-lights together on a single circuit," said Dennis Krize, senior vice president of Nicolas Holiday, Inc. The Taiwan-based firm has manufactured seasonal lighting products for more than 50 years, and has been a licensee for GE brand holiday lighting since 2000.

"LED light strings may be more expensive initially, but the energy savings on some light strings will more than offset the added costs in two or three seasons," Krize said.

Longer life?

While UL has not specifically tested lamps for longevity, products marked with the UL Holographic labels have undergone a series of testing related to mechanical, physical and electrical criteria. Product testing replicating the types of stresses caused by wind, moisture and rough handling are also conducted on samples.

"These products are designed to last a lot longer," said La Rocca. "I cannot say that an LED lighting string will last longer than an incandescent lighting string, but I can tell you that a lighting string provided with the Energy Star® logo must come with a specified warranty backed by the manufacturer. Those marked with Energy Star labels are replaceable within a designated period."

Because LEDs produce little or no heat, the temperature concerns may be reduced, he added, although consumers should always look for the UL logo on seasonal and holiday lighting to be sure the products were tested by UL.

Although UL 588 is a voluntary standard, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission requires that manufacturers of seasonal lighting products meet the specific sections described in UL 588, the Standard for Safety of Seasonal and Holiday Decorative Products.

"Even though the majority of the products covered by UL 588 are considered to be for temporary use, in many cases the requirements are more stringent than other products that are for use all year," La Rocca added.

Derrill Holly writes on cooperative issues for the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, the Arlington, Va.-based service arm of the nation's 900-plus consumer-owned, not-for-profit electric cooperatives.

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At $59, this blade of legendary Damascus steel is a real steal

Damascus steel is the stuff of legend. Using a technique first mastered in the ancient city, swords made from Damascus steel were known to slice gun barrels in half and separate single strands of hair in two, even if the hair simply floated down onto the blade.

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What customers are saying about Stauer knives...

★★★★★

"Very hefty, well-built knife and sheath. Extremely good-looking and utilitarian."

— R., Lacey, Washington

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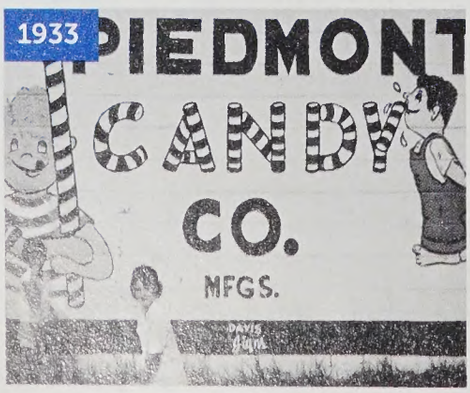
Southern Refresh-Mints

Red Bird Peppermints have become a North Carolina tradition

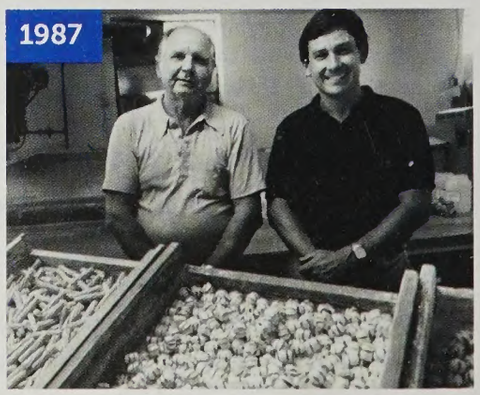
By Leah Chester-Davis

The Piedmont Candy Company in Lexington has delivered Christmas cheer to North Carolina families for generations. Its most popular candies—Red Bird peppermint sticks and puffs—are an iconic flavor of the holidays. Their name gives a nod to the North Carolina state bird, the cardinal, though their popularity reaches well beyond state lines. The candy is part of holidays nationwide, and for many, it is a Christmas tradition passed down through families.



Edward Ebelein, the son of German immigrants, formed the Piedmont Candy Company in 1933, drawing on years of experience at other candy factories.

Red Bird candies were made using open copper kettles to heat cane sugar to 300 degrees. Using this method, about 2,000 pounds of candy puffs and sticks were made each day.



In 1987, the Ebeleins sold the company to another local North Carolina family, the Reids (Left: Robert Ebelein with Doug Reid). Today, the Piedmont Candy Company is one of the few candy companies with production still in the USA.

The roots of Piedmont Candy Company extend back to 1890 when its founder, Edward Ebelein, the son of German immigrants, became an apprentice in several candy factories in the Northeast. In 1919, he was invited to Lexington to join two other men to form the North Carolina Candy Company. They made many different kinds of candies, including peppermints and Dixie Chocolate Cream Drops. In 1929, the company folded because one of the partners died and the widow requested to be paid for her stake in the business. The Great Depression added to the woes.

Ebelein moved to Puerto Rico to help run an ice cream factory, but returned to Lexington in 1933.

"He bought the junk left over from the sale of equipment from the old company, which included boxes imprinted with the Red Bird logo," says granddaughter Jeanne Leonard. Ebelein named the company Piedmont Candy Company. Later, Ebelein's sons, Ed and Robert, ran the company until Robert (Jeanne's father) became sole owner in the 1950s.

Candy stripes are still molded and applied by hand, making each finished stick or puff a little unique.

"As a child, I remember one of the workers would always pinch off a little bit of the hot candy before the peppermint was added to give us a warm sample," she recalls from her visit to the factory. "I was always fascinated by the ladies who could cut the long strips of peppermint into sticks with a big pair of scissors without measuring a thing!"

The company remained in the Ebelein family until 1987, when it was sold to another North Carolina family, the Reids, who continue to run the company today. Doug Reid, who had a background in textiles, ran the company for several years. His son, Chris, now serves as CEO. The company has stuck with the original recipe, save for a few tweaks over the years.

The Red Bird candy difference

"What makes our candy different from candy canes is that it is pure cane sugar, peppermint oil, and no corn syrup," explains Marketing Director Jenna Paquin. Red Bird peppermint sticks and puffs are crumbly, soft and dissolve quickly. Candies made with corn syrup are hard and crunchy.

Don McKenzie

Up until 2002, large open copper kettles were used to heat the pure cane sugar to 300 degrees. While the company has added modern production equipment to meet its demand of 55,000 pounds per day (up from 2,000 pounds per day in the early years), much of the handcrafted candy process remains the same.

"The candy stripes are still molded and applied by hand, which results in each finished stick or puff being a little unique," says Paquin.

Versatile candy sticks

At some point, someone discovered a peppermint stick could be used as a straw when stuck into an orange or a lemon. Paquin says people refer to this treat as citrus suckers. The peppermint sticks sweeten the orange or lemon juice.

"The sticks also are great for stirring into any kind of hot beverage," she adds. "Other uses during the holiday season are crushed sticks or puffs for chocolate bark or brownies. The nostalgic tie-in makes an extra special baked gift to have around the holidays."

Beyond peppermint

Paquin says they are always trying to innovate and try new flavors. Cotton candy and birthday cake are popular new flavors. They also have an assorted mix that has 10 flavors, "a treasure hunt of an item." But the peppermint candy remains the company's top seller, especially at this time of year, when they evoke feelings of nostalgia for Christmases past.

"The traditional stocking stuffer was a stick of peppermint and a piece of fruit," Paquin says. "Back when there was not as much disposable income, candy was super special and a big Christmas gift."

Leah Chester-Davis loves to explore North Carolina from her home in Davidson. Her business, Chester-Davis Communications (chester-davis.com), specializes in food, farm, gardening and lifestyle brands and organizations.

carolinacountry.com
Watch videos detailing the fascinating candy-making process at Piedmont Candy Company. Plus, pinpoint places nearby to purchase Red Bird candies.

Great gift idea!

Peppermint Crunch Truffles

- 1 package Oreos
- 1 cup crushed Red Bird Peppermint Puffs or Sticks
- 8 oz. cream cheese
- ¼ teaspoon peppermint extract
- 1 lb. dark chocolate

Process Oreos in a food processor until crumbly. Add chunked cream cheese, peppermint extract and ½ cup of the crushed peppermint candies until combined, being careful not to over-process.

Shape into 1-inch balls and place into the freezer until they are cold to the touch and hold together well.

Melt the chocolate in a double boiler. Coat the balls by placing them in the chocolate and rolling them around with a spoon to cover. Lift the balls out of the chocolate with a fork, allowing the excess chocolate to drip, then carefully place on a sheet of waxed paper. Sprinkle the top of the truffle with remaining crushed peppermint candy.

Allow to set.

Truffles will last for a few days in a covered container in the refrigerator.

Plethora of peppermint recipes
Want more ways to use your peppermint sticks and puffs? Visit celebratethesweet.wordpress.com for more than 20 recipes using Red Bird candies, such as Peppermint Whipped Cream and Peppermint White Chocolate Cookie Pops. *Sweet!*

Making the World Taste Good

The Candy Factory
15 N. Main Street, Lexington
lexingtoncandyfactory.com

A mile or so from the Piedmont Candy Company is a candy shop that dates back to 1890. Located on Main Street in the old Lexington Hardware Building, the shop—called The Candy Factory—is owned by Jeanne Leonard and her sisters, Leigh Foster and Beth Dean.

The shop was once affiliated with Piedmont Candy Company, but when their father, Robert Ebelein, sold the company in 1987, he kept the retail store.

The old-fashioned candy store is filled with bins, barrels and baskets of a wide variety of sweets. An entire section is dedicated to Red Bird and includes both traditional and new flavors, as well as historical photos and mementoes from the early days of the company.

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Lissa Gotwals

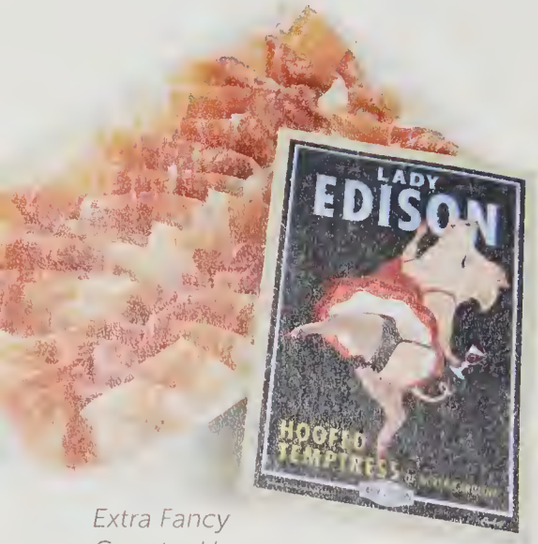
Local Flavors

By Leah Chester-Davis

Farmer's Daughter won a Good Food Award this year for its Strawberry Preserves.

These award-winning NC foods take the guesswork out of gifting

North Carolina's food artisans have offered up another basket full of gift ideas this year. While food entrepreneurs and their delectable creations abound across the state, we are sharing some of the winners of impressive awards competitions.



Extra Fancy Country Ham

Aging perfection

Many holiday meals feature ham as the starring attraction. Lady Edison (ladyedisonpork.com) uses sustainably raised hogs to produce country ham and other cured charcuterie. The Lady Edison Extra Fancy Country Ham won a Good Food Award this year (see page 16 for more on the awards).

Lady Edison's hams are aged at least 18 months which give them a taste more savory than salty. Owner Sam Suchoff, who is known for The Pig restaurant in Chapel Hill, produces the ham in conjunction with Rufus Brown of Johnston County Hams. The ham is quite pricey, and is available in specialty stores and online.

Cheese pairs perfectly with ham, or as an appetizer or after-dinner treat. A selection of cheeses makes a nice gift and North Carolina has many award-winning cheese makers who offer a wide variety. This year, Boxcarr Handmade Cheese of Cedar Grove (boxcarrhandmadecheese.com) captured a Good Food Award for its "cottonseed" cheese.

Owners Austin Genke, wife Dani,

BoxCarr Handmade Cheese

Cottonseed Cheese by BoxCarr Handmade Cheese

Cape Fear Pirate Candy

Cape Fear Pirate Candy captured the Grand Champion title in the NC Specialty Foods competition.

and sister Samantha have racked up an impressive list of awards the past few years. Their website describes cottonseed as having a "delicate, snowy rind that yields to a creamy, gooey center with notes of earth and truffle in a mixed milk masterpiece." Their cheeses are stocked in stores statewide and beyond.

Sauce bosses

Kitchens of Africa

There's always a place for condiments and sauces that kick up flavors and add to a celebration. One sauce with Good Food Award accolades is Kitchens of Africa's Zanzibar Curry Simmer Sauce (kitchensofafrica.com). Jainaba Jeng, its founder, draws inspiration from her home country of Gambia, in western Africa, in creating her sauces and marinades. Another of her sauces, Yassa, an onion simmer sauce, won last year and was mentioned in our December 2016 issue ("Gifts with Good Taste," page 10).

Farmer's Daughter of Hillsborough, (farmersdaughterbrand.com) a Piedmont Electric member, won a 2017 Good Food Award for Sweet Potato Habanero Hot Sauce. Since sweet potatoes reign supreme in the state, owner April McGreger gives a nod to our state's veggie with her creation. Farmer's Daughter Brand has won numerous awards for its other products as well, including three Good Food Awards last year.

Preserving goodness

Preserves, jams and jellies always seem to make the list as a popular food gift. What better way to capture summer's goodness to enjoy year-round? Farmer's Daughter won its second Good Food Award this year for its Strawberry Preserves, made from organic, peak-season strawberries.

Each year, the North Carolina Specialty Foods Association holds a statewide competition. Food entrepreneurs across the state compete in several categories. This year's winner in the condiment category, which went on to win the overall Grand Champion title, is Cape Fear Pirate Candy for its Honey Kissed Candied Banana Peppers (capefearpiratecandy.com).

Owner Tara Moore of Wilmington describes the flavor as sweet, mildly spicy or tangy, with a kiss of honey. They also offer Candied Jalapenos and a few other products.

NC confectioners

For the sweet tooth, plenty of local confections are sure to please. Two North Carolina companies garnered Good Food Awards this year. French Broad Chocolates of Asheville (frenchbroadchocolates.com) was recognized for its Sorghum Caramel. Last year, the company won for its Hazelnut & Almond Dragee. It offers plenty of other temptations in both chocolate and confections.

Gingerbread and holidays are a perfect combo, and GerDan Chocolates (bit.ly/gerdanchocolates) of Smithfield delivers a treat that evokes the iconic holiday flavor. Gingerbread Caramels were the winning ticket for GerDan, capturing a Good Food Award this year.

The business name combines the owners' names, the husband and wife team of Geraldine and Dan Doren. Their gingerbread caramels were inspired by a children's treat from Geraldine's hometown of Dublin, Ireland. GerDan's version uses cream from a nearby creamery and locally grown organic ginger. They also won a bronze medal for their Rhubarb and Ginger bonbon which consists of rhubarb caramel on top of fresh ginger ganache in a dark chocolate shell.

"The inspiration for this confection came from one of my favorite pies, rhubarb and ginger, which my mother would make back in Ireland," says Geraldine. The company is also known for its Brew Chews, which are caramels made with beer.

French Broad Chocolates

Sorghum Caramels by French Broad Chocolates

GerDan Chocolates

Award-winning Gingerbread Caramels by GerDan Chocolates

CREATIVE SNACKS CO
organic
COCONUT SNACKS
cranberries | cashews & almonds | chia seeds
REAL GOOD, FEEL GOOD SNACKS
NET WT 4 OZ (113g)
Creative Snacks Co.

Crunchy, slightly salty snacks add a counterbalance to sugary sweets. Creative Snacks Company (creativesnacks.com) of Greensboro captured a SOFI (Specialty Food Association) award this year for its Organic Coconut snack with cranberries, cashews, almonds and chia seeds. SOFI awards represent culinary creativity across America and around the globe. Find Creative Snacks Company's other SOFI-winning snacks and its other products at stores statewide and beyond.

Keeping spirits bright

Cocktail bitters are a flavor extract, adding aroma and balance to a mixed drink—think of them as a seasoning for cocktails. A Raleigh-based company captured a Good Food Award this year for its "Apothecary #15" spruce and birch bitters.

"Cocktail bitters are important ingredients in a well-made drink, but remain an afterthought even with a growing focus on local or craft spirits and homemade syrups," explains Craig Rudewicz, of the downtown Raleigh-based Crude Bitters and Sodas (crudebitters.com). Rudewicz and wife Lindsay Lasserre create a number of bitters with pleasing flavor profiles.

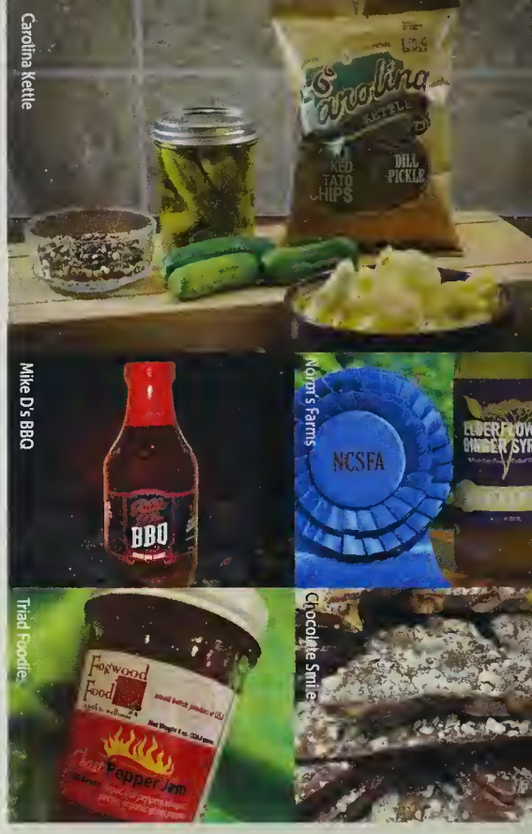
"I wanted to craft a bitters that was woodsy and bitter but still had a depth of flavor like a vermouth or amaro," he says. "Spicebush is used in the maceration, which lends a citrusy and dark spice flavor to the woodsy aroma."

Crude Bitters and Sodas has two different sample sets that are popular during the holidays. One is a four-bottle set of year-round flavors (rosemary-grapefruit-peppercorn, coffee-cocoa, hibiscus-lavender-oak, and orange-fig). The other is a build-your-own-set of seasonal bitters. All have usage recommendations on the bottle. The company teaches classes three to four times each month, which also can be a fun gift.

Leah Chester-Davis loves to explore North Carolina from her home in Davidson. Her business, Chester-Davis Communications (chester-davis.com), specializes in food, farm, gardening and lifestyle brands and organizations.

Craig Rudewicz, of Crude Bitters and Sodas, crafts cocktail bitters in a wide range of aromas and flavors.

Stacey Sprenz Photography



NC Award Winners

The North Carolina Specialty Foods Association holds a statewide competition each year. These companies received recognition in addition to the overall Grand Champion, Cape Fear Pirate Candy:

BBQ
Mike D's Spicy BBQ Sauce
by Mike D's BBQ, mikedsbbq.com

COOKIES/CAKES
Chocolate Chip Cookie
by Anna's Gourmet Goodies
annasgourmetgoodies.com

CONFECTIONS
Almond Truffle Bark
by Chocolate Smiles, chocolatesmiles.com

DRINKS
Elderflower Ginger Syrup
by Norm's Farms, normsfarms.com

DRY RUBS/MIXES
Hickory Smoked Sea Salt & Chipotle Rub
by Yo Momma's Style
yomommasstyle.com

JAMS/JELLIES
Ghost Pepper Jelly
by Fogwood Food, fogwoodfood.com

NUTS
Wingnuts by America's Best Nuts
americasbestnutco.com

SALTY SNACKS
Dill Pickle Kettle Cooked Potato Chips
by Carolina Kettle, carolinakettle.com

Recognizing Truly Good Food

The Good Food Awards is a national initiative to recognize craft food producers who excel in taste, sustainability and enriching their communities. Visit goodfoodawards.org for more information and a full list of winners.

got to be NC AGRICULTURE

These artisans, farms and shops are just a small sample of what the state has to offer. Visit gottobenc.com for more gift-giving ideas from food artisans near you, or find this article on carolinacountry.com and leave a comment with your favorite finds.

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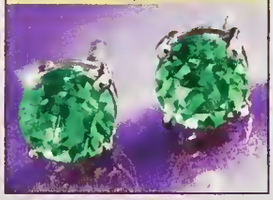

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Driving the Sticker Car

Laureen Wilkins has made her brother's car a roving memorial you can't miss

By Donna Campbell Smith

You may have seen Laureen Wilkins' car. You'll remember it if you have—it is literally covered with stickers. The purple '97 Toyota RAV4 belonged to Laureen's brother, Michael Tucker, who was dying from complications of diabetes. Knowing he would never drive it again, Michael offered the car to his nieces. They didn't want it, but Laureen did.

The car had been "totaled" in a wreck while Michael owned it. The back window was broken out, one of the doors and the hood were damaged. But it ran good. Laureen covered the window with plastic and duct tape until the window was replaced, and her brother-in-law salvaged a hood and a door, which were black. Now the purple car had a black door and hood.

Laureen didn't have the old car repainted—it wasn't worth it. But that was when she started adding stickers to the car.

"It excited me to be able to stick something on my car," she laughs. She'd always been cautioned about bumper stickers and such as they would ruin the paint. Well, as she points out, this car's paint job couldn't get much worse.

She started buying stickers whenever she and her husband went on trips. When her work required her to travel from her Henderson home, she added more stickers. Then her co-workers began bringing her stickers from their trips. The collection grew.

Now you can't miss the car. Friends see it in a parking lot and know Laureen is there.

"I can't hide anywhere," she says. It is not unusual for her to come out of a store and find a stranger reading the stickers on her car. Sometimes people will yell at her: "I love your car!" when she passes by. Laureen doesn't mind.

The very first sticker was put on the car by her brother—it is the parking permit sticker from the condo where he'd lived. Her niece, Sarah Robinson, has given her the only ones from out of the country: one from her school trip to Greece and another from a mission trip to Ecuador. People love to give her stickers. One older gentleman gave her a whole bag of them.

"They were generic stickers, peace signs and such. But that was okay. I put them all on my car," Laureen says.

When asked which ones are her favorites, she thinks hard before saying: "the wildlife." Her husband works for Ducks Unlimited, and they both love wildlife. One that holds special meaning to Laureen is from Middleboro, Kentucky. "Mama and Daddy were from there. It is getting raggedy."

Laureen likes her wildlife stickers the best. Her husband works for Ducks Unlimited, and they both love wildlife.

A lot of the first stickers are getting raggedy or coming off. Laureen hopes to be able to replace them. She confesses she doesn't wash her car because she doesn't want to mess up her stickers. "I just spot clean it."

The car has become a memorial to Laureen's brother.

"I'll keep fixing anything on it to keep it on the road. It's the memories, the feeling I get when I sit behind the wheel." There is a dent in the armrest from where her brother's elbow rested while he drove. She touches that spot as she says: "I feel like he's kind of with me."

Donna Campbell Smith is a Carolina Country contributing writer who lives in Franklin County.

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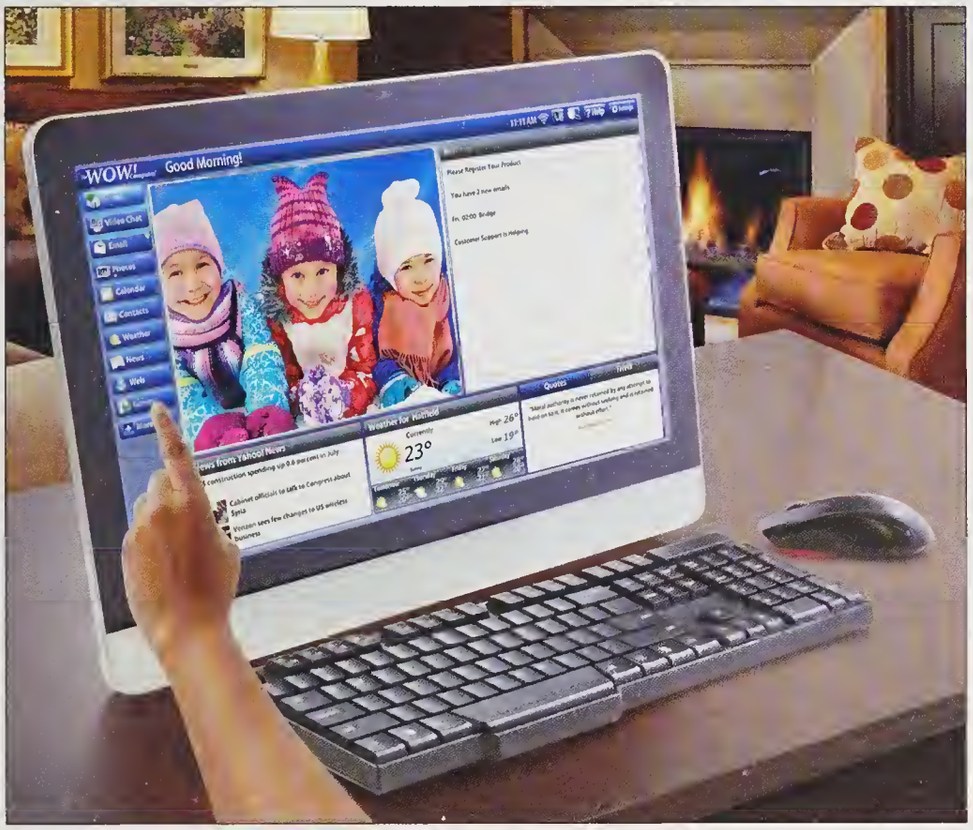

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Celebrate the Season of Giving

Five ways to help those in need during the holidays

Giving is the true spirit of the holiday season. In addition to gift-giving in the traditional material sense, there are other meaningful ways to make a difference in your community and give back to those in need. Here are some ideas you can put into action.

Donate to a food pantry

Churches and food pantries are always in need of donations, and the holidays are a great time to help provide a meal for someone who may not otherwise be able to eat. Canned goods and other non-perishable items like cereal, oatmeal, rice, peanut butter, and spices are often needed. Some pantries can also use non-edible items, such as soap, shampoo and other toiletries.

You can donate items at one of North Carolina's major food banks that serve as distribution hubs, or at community relief agencies such as food pantries and shelters that they partner with in their region. Visit ncfoodbanks.org for more information and a locator map.

Attend a charity event

Concerts, theatrical performances and home tours are often held during the holiday season, with the proceeds going to benefit a local charity or service organization. Many community service clubs also offer benefit dinners or bake sales that can provide a positive impact.

Volunteer at a soup kitchen

For the homeless, extended exposure to cold weather can be dangerous. Soup kitchens and shelters are often more crowded during this time of year. While aid facilities often see an influx of volunteers during the holidays, most are still grateful for the extra hands to help serve a warm meal or assist with other tasks around the facilities. You can find local kitchens, pantries, churches and shelters that serve food by selecting the food bank nearest you at ncfoodbanks.org as well as foodpantries.org/st/north_carolina.

Host a coat drive

Providing clothing, specifically coats, for the less fortunate during the colder months is another way to assist. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a warm winter coat is considered a "budget extra" for nearly 15 percent of Americans living in poverty. One Warm Coat, a national nonprofit, has facilitated more than 27,000 coat drives nationwide. It provides free resources for you to hold a coat drive in your community, and partners with registered agencies and retail partners across NC that will distribute the coats. Learn more at onewarmcoat.org/youcanhelp.

Adopt a family

There are many organizations that can help you sponsor a family in your area to help provide gifts and necessities for the holidays. Most groups can provide you with a list of items each family member needs and wants, to make your shopping easier. Check with nonprofits such as the Salvation Army as well as churches in your area to see if they offer such a program.

—FamilyFeatures.com

Bah, Humbug!

Don't enjoy holiday decorating? We have strategies for you.

While some folks love decorating for Christmas, others dread it and consider it a tedious task. But it doesn't have to feel like a chore, especially with some planning.

It helps to remember that decorating is a wonderful opportunity to make joyful memories with your loved ones. Approaching it as a family-wide festivity, rather than a parents-only burden, teaches responsibility and can lift everyone's spirits. Here are some strategies to make decking the halls not only easier, but more meaningful and merry as well.

Get organized early

Don't try to make it all happen in one day. If your seasonal décor is stowed away in the garage or attic, dust it off and get greenery and lights untangled before the day you plan to do your actual decorating. Locating these items and getting them prepped to be strung and hung may take some time. Preparing for this can keep you from getting overwhelmed. Set a date for getting decorations ready and a second date for decorating. Be sure to get the latter on everyone's calendars.

Clear the decks

Clear space in your living room for incoming decor, especially in the area where you plan to place your Christmas tree. If you are replacing everyday furnishings, such as centerpieces and art, pack them in the emptied boxes that held Christmas decorations. Be sure to wrap and cushion all fragile items.

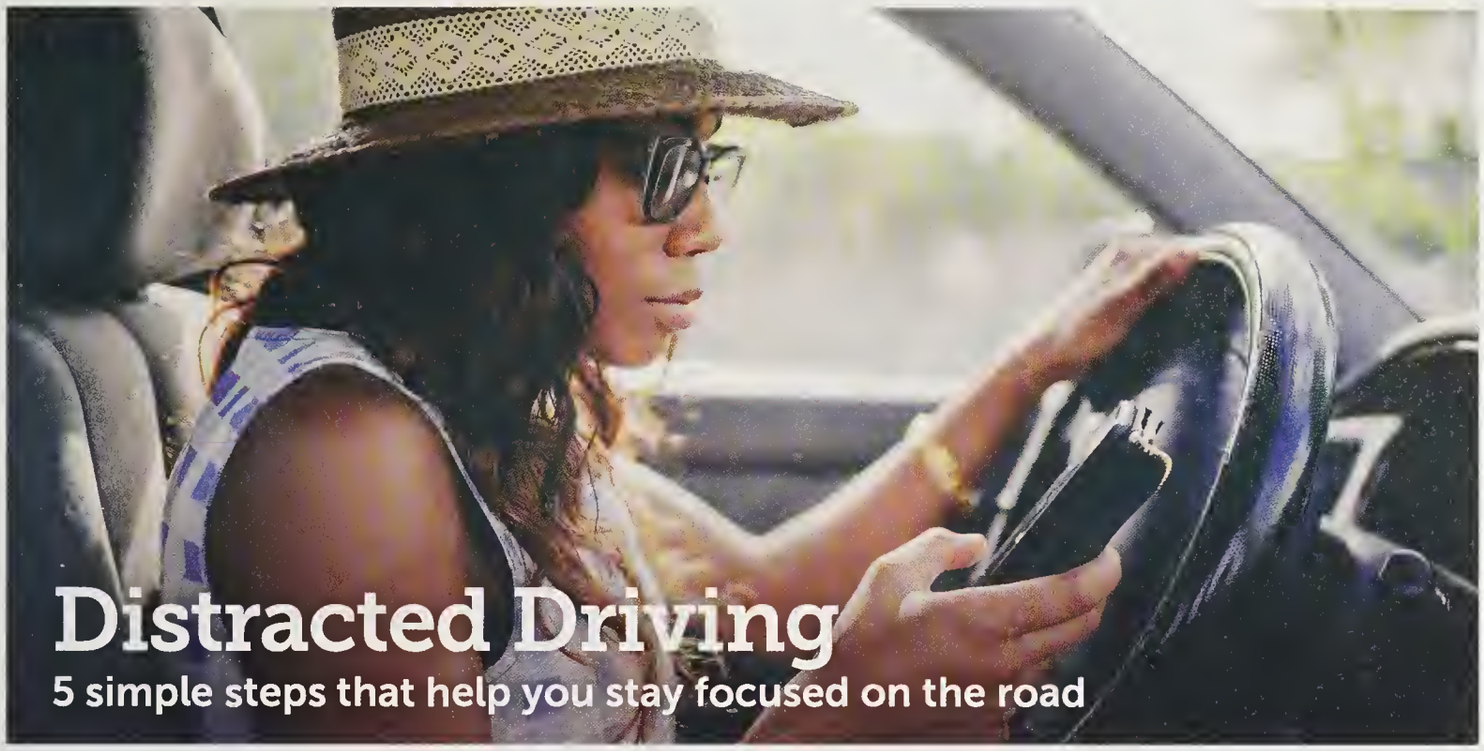
A fun, family affair

While certain duties may not be for everybody, such as those that require getting on a ladder, kid-friendly tasks include helping to hang Christmas stockings and stringing paper ornaments. In addition to wrapping greenery and hanging ornaments, teens can create a festive atmosphere by making popcorn, taking fun photos of family members and creating a playlist of holiday tracks. Involve your children in making cookies or let a teen handle it all; everyone will appreciate the delicious smell of the treats as they bake. When the decorating is over and boxes are put away, everyone can curl up and watch a favorite holiday movie.

Make use of technology

Many new devices are available that can help simplify and manage holiday lighting. For example, outdoor laser LED light sets let you cast a colorful holiday show on your house without ever having to string lights. Treemote, a wireless, Christmas-tree shaped remote approved for indoor use, can control lights so you can skip crawling behind your tree to turn lights on and off in the morning and at night. As with any electrical product, check safety certifications and follow manufacturer directions for use.

—StatePoint



Distracted Driving

5 simple steps that help you stay focused on the road

Mobile phones have become an essential part of life for most people. However, this technology can also be a distraction when driving, which puts everyone on the road at risk.

According to the North Carolina Traffic Crash Facts report for 2016, there were at least 11 fatalities and 575 injuries reported in which the driver was known to be specifically distracted by electronic communication devices such as cellphones. Overall, it cited 20.3 percent of crashes in NC involved a driver who was distracted. It's worth noting that "driver distraction" is a self-reporting, contributing circumstance; therefore data collected may not reflect the severity of the problem.

Despite common rhetoric, being distracted by technology isn't just an issue for teens. It's a problem across generations. For adults, the expectation to stay productive and reachable, especially while working, means a constant temptation to use cellphones when driving.

Recognizing the ethical and liability issues that arise when employees drive while distracted, employers are implementing distracted-driving policies. Cargill is among companies that prohibit the use of mobile devices, including hands-free technology, while an employee is driving on behalf of the company.

"I had to try the policy myself first," says David MacLennan, Cargill's Chairman and CEO. "Once I knew what it would take to go completely cellphone free in my car, I could then make it work for our entire company."

He offers these five steps for anyone looking to eliminate distracted driving:

1 Auto response

Use a free automated response app to let callers know that you're driving and can't take the call. You can personalize the response so incoming calls or texts receive a text message saying you're on the road.

2 Do not disturb

If you're driving a vehicle outfitted with communication technology, use its "do not disturb" feature to unplug from calls and texts while behind the wheel.

3 Out of sight, out of mind

Put your cellphone where you can't see or reach it, such as anchored in the back seat.

4 Pull over

Let a call go to voicemail and pull over in a safe location to return it. Or, plan a couple of pull-over "cellphone stops" along your route.

5 Avoid ALL distractions

Eating, grooming and reading are activities people try to tackle while driving. Be smart and stay focused.

—Brandpoint

NC laws

According to NC legislative statutes, all drivers in NC, regardless of age, are banned from texting while their vehicle is in motion. They are not allowed to compose, read or send text messages or emails while driving.

Regarding cellphone use, drivers under 18 are prohibited from operating a motor vehicle on a street or public vehicular area in NC while using a mobile phone while the vehicle is in motion. Exceptions apply to allow minors to use a mobile phone to communicate with a parent, legal guardian, spouse, or emergency personnel.

Violators for either law can be pulled over, cited and fined.

Supper Cheat Sheet

Pull off a fast one with these tasty, one-pan meals

With the holidays upon us, your to-do list can be pretty long. There's much more shopping and schlepping, and these extra tasks can make preparing a delicious family dinner seem overwhelming.

Fortunately, clever solutions like sheet pan suppers make it easy to create flavorful dishes that come together quickly and clean up just as fast. Here are two delicious recipes for your busy nights. For more recipes, visit onions-usa.org.

—FamilyFeatures.com

Sheet Pan-Style Buddha Bowls

- 2 yellow onions, peeled and cut into ½-inch wedges
- ½ head of red or purple cabbage, cut into wedges
- 2 red potatoes, cut into ½-inch wedges
- 1 small butternut squash, peeled and ½-inch diced
- 1 pound Brussels sprouts, halved
- Extra-virgin olive oil
- Salt and black pepper, to taste
- 1½ cups quinoa, cooked according to package directions

Tahini sauce

- 1 tablespoon tahini
- ½ lemon, juiced
- 1 teaspoon Dijon mustard
- ½–1 teaspoon maple syrup
- 2 avocados, peeled and sliced
- Fresh parsley

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Line 13-by-18-inch sheet pan with parchment paper.

Place onion, cabbage, potatoes, squash and Brussels sprouts in single layer on pan. Drizzle with olive oil and season with salt and pepper. Roast vegetables 40 minutes, or until tender. Add more salt and pepper if needed.

While vegetables roast, cook quinoa.

To make sauce: In small bowl, whisk tahini, lemon juice, mustard and syrup until smooth.

To assemble Buddha bowls: Spoon quinoa into bowls. Add roasted veggies and garnish with avocado and parsley. Drizzle tahini sauce over each bowl and serve.

Yield: 4–6 servings

Spicy Roasted Jambalaya

- 1 large yellow onion, diced
- ½ large green bell pepper, diced
- ½ large yellow bell pepper, diced
- ½ large red bell pepper, diced
- 3 stalks celery, sliced or diced
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1–2 jalapeños, seeded and diced
- 1 pint cherry tomatoes
- 3 tablespoons olive oil, divided
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon black pepper
- 1 andouille sausage link (13.5 ounces), sliced
- 1 pound large shrimp, peeled and deveined
- 1 tablespoon Cajun seasoning blend
- Linguine noodles, cooked
- 1–2 lemons, sliced in thin wedges
- 2 green onions, sliced
- Fresh, chopped parsley

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

Line 13-by-18-inch sheet pan with parchment paper.

In large bowl, evenly combine onion, bell peppers, celery, garlic, jalapeños, tomatoes, 2 tablespoons olive oil, salt and pepper. Spread out evenly on pan in single layer. Add slices of andouille sausage. Roast 15 to 20 minutes, or until vegetables are tender and start to brown.

Toss shrimp with Cajun seasoning and cook linguine noodles.

When ready, remove baking sheet from oven. Place shrimp on top of vegetable and sausage mixture in single layer. Top with half the lemon wedges. Return to oven and cook about 5 to 8 minutes, or until shrimp are no longer pink.

Serve over linguine garnished with green onions and parsley, with remaining fresh lemon wedges on the side.

Yield: Serves 4–6

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21 GALLON, 2.5 HP, 125 PSI VERTICAL OIL-LUBE AIR COMPRESSOR

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NOW $149.99

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8750 MAX. STARTING/ 7000 RUNNING WATTS 13 HP (420 CC) GAS GENERATOR

Customer Rating ★★★★½

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SAVE $2170

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Wheel kit and battery sold separately.

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LIMIT 1 - Cannot be used with other discount, coupon or prior purchase. Coupon good at our stores, HarborFreight.com or by calling 800-423-2567. Offer good while supplies last. Shipping & Handling charges may apply if not picked up in-store. Non-transferable. Original coupon must be presented. Valid through 3/30/18. Limit one FREE GIFT coupon per customer per day.

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26", 4 DRAWER TOOL CART

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- 6200 cu. in. of storage
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- Weighs 97 lbs.

SAVE $79

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1 TON CAPACITY FOLDABLE SHOP CRANE

Customer Rating ★★★★

SAVE $80

- Boom extends from 36-1/4" to 50-1/4"
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BADLAND Battle Tested — SUPER COUPON

2500 LB. ELECTRIC WINCH WITH WIRELESS REMOTE CONTROL

Voted Best Winches

NOW $49.99

SAVE $130

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Customer Rating ★★★★½

COMPARE TO SUPERWINCH $179.99 MODEL: 1125220

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1/2" COMPOSITE PRO EXTREME TORQUE AIR IMPACT WRENCH

1190 TORQUE FT. LBS. BOLT BREAKAWAY

NEW

- Weighs 4.4 lbs.

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SAVE $394

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HaulMaster — SUPER COUPON

Customer Rating ★★★★½

STEP STOOL/ WORKING PLATFORM

- 350 lb. capacity

SAVE 65%

NOW $19.99

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COMPARE TO GPL $57.55 MODEL: H-21

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Customer Rating ★★★★½

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- Weighs 105 lbs.

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drill master — SUPER COUPON

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4-1/2" ANGLE GRINDER

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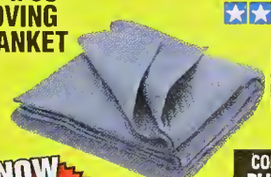
LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 3/30/18*

HaulMaster — SUPER COUPON

72" x 80" MOVING BLANKET

Customer Rating ★★★★½



SAVE 70%

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TILTING FLAT PANEL TV MOUNT

Customer Rating ★★★★½

SAVE 81%

- 176 lb. capacity

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LIMIT 7 - Coupon valid through 3/30/18*

SUPER COUPON

SOLAR ROPE LIGHT

Customer Rating ★★★★

- Great outdoor accent lighting
- Super bright light

SAVE 66%

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COMPARE TO HAMPTON BAY $29.97 MODEL: D2050-0555R

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LIMIT 9 - Coupon valid through 3/30/18*

VIKING — SUPER COUPON

JUMP STARTER AND POWER PACK

Customer Rating ★★★★½

NEW

NOW $69.99

SAVE $60

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COMPARE TO SCHUMACHER ELECTRIC $129.99 MODEL: SL1

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LIMIT 3 - Coupon valid through 3/30/18*

CENTRAL MACHINERY — SUPER COUPON

20 TON SHOP PRESS

- Pair of arbor plates included

Customer Rating ★★★★½

NOW $149.99

SAVE $72

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COMPARE TO MAXWORKS $222.49 MODEL: GP2002

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LIMIT 4 - Coupon valid through 3/30/18*

HARDY — SUPER COUPON

POWDER-FREE NITRILE GLOVES PACK OF 100

- 5 mil thickness

Customer Rating ★★★★½

SAVE 55%

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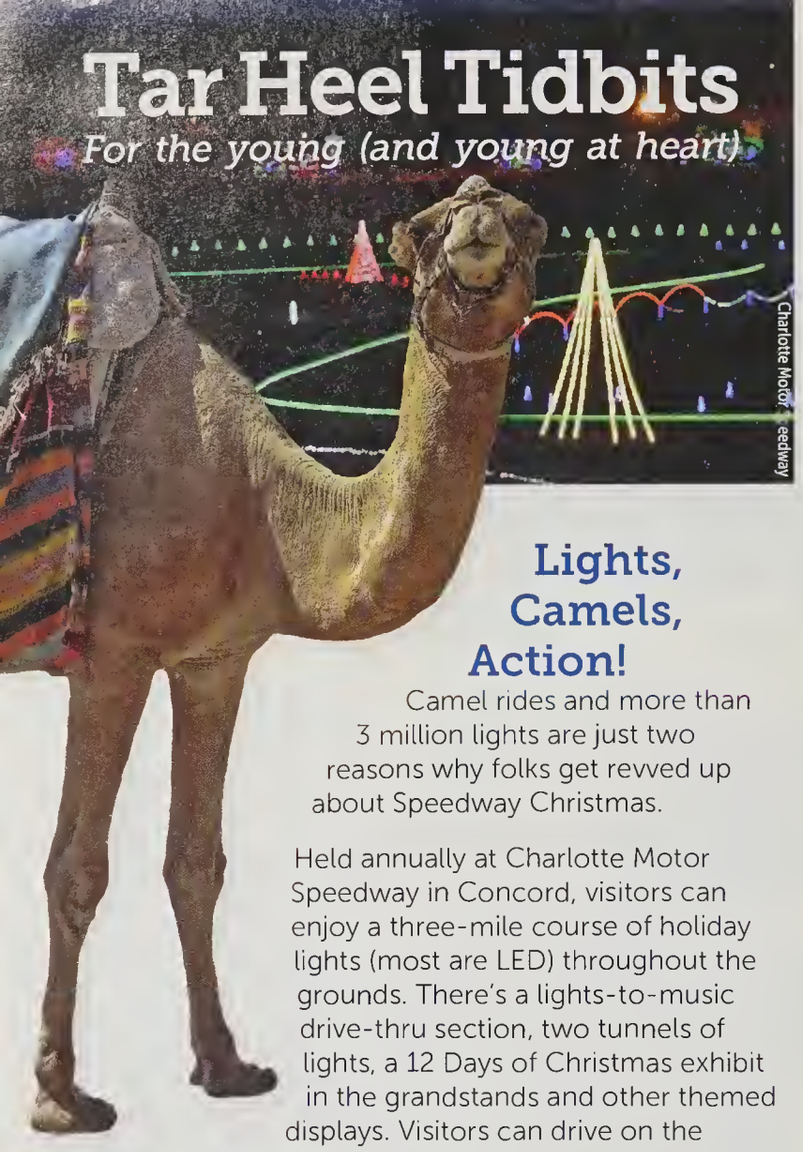
*Original coupon only. No use on prior purchases after 30 days from original purchase or without original receipt. Valid through 3/30/18.

At Harbor Freight Tools, the "Compare" or "comp at" price means that the same item or a similar functioning item was advertised for sale at or above the "Compare" or "comp at" price by another retailer in the U.S. within the past 180 days. Prices advertised by others may vary by location. No other meaning of "Compare" or "comp at" should be implied. For more information, go to HarborFreight.com or see store associate.

Tar Heel Tidbits

For the young (and young at heart)



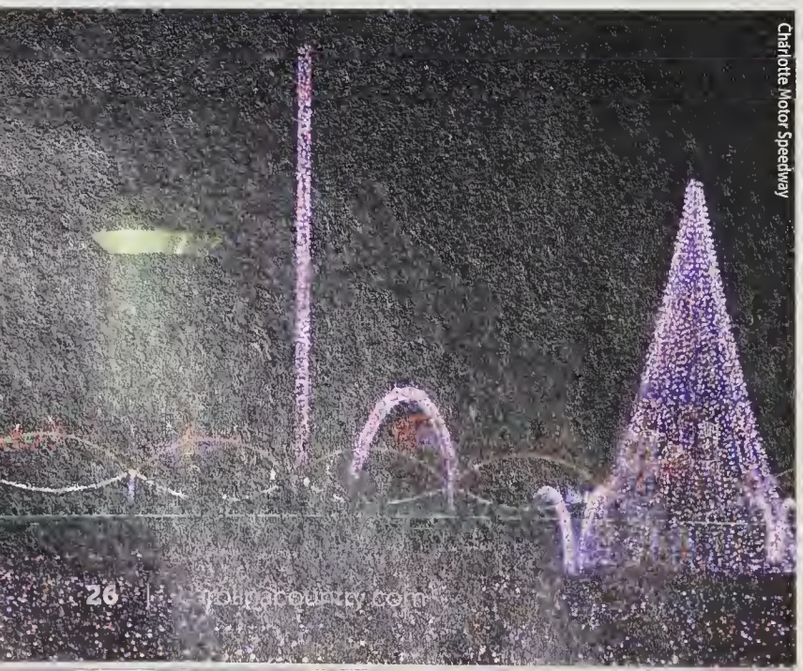
Lights, Camels, Action!

Camel rides and more than 3 million lights are just two reasons why folks get revved up about Speedway Christmas.

Held annually at Charlotte Motor Speedway in Concord, visitors can enjoy a three-mile course of holiday lights (most are LED) throughout the grounds. There's a lights-to-music drive-thru section, two tunnels of lights, a 12 Days of Christmas exhibit in the grandstands and other themed displays. Visitors can drive on the actual racetrack for roughly one mile.

In the infield, a Christmas village offers camel and pony rides, a petting zoo, a Bethlehem village with live actors, horse-drawn wagon rides, Santa's workshop, and photos with Santa and the Ice Princess.

Speedway Christmas runs through Sunday, Dec. 31, except for Monday, Dec. 25. The Christmas Village is open Thursdays through Sunday and most of Christmas week. Passes range from $20 per car (Mondays, village closed) to $30 per car (Saturdays, village open). For more information and to buy tickets, call 800-455-3267 or visit charlottemotorspeedway.com.

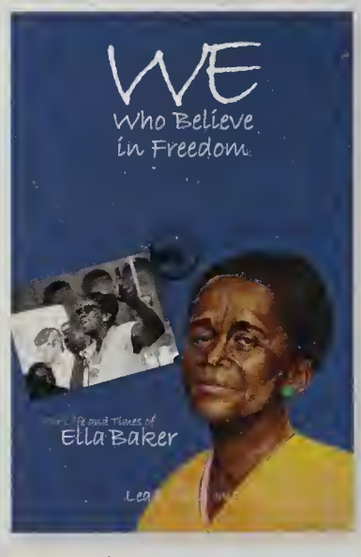


GETTING TO KNOW

Ella Baker

Born in Virginia in 1903 and raised in Littleton, civil rights advocate Ella Baker had a sense for social injustice early on. As a slave, her grandmother had been whipped for refusing to marry a man chosen by the slave owner, and Baker was inspired by her elder's strength and courage. Baker's parents emphasized the importance of education and hard work. A bright student, she graduated from Shaw University in Raleigh as valedictorian of her class in 1927.

Eager to make a difference, Baker moved to New York City and eventually played a key role in influential organizations such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. An energetic crusader, she focused on developing skills in others, and was especially gifted at mentoring other civil rights activists who became better known. In later years, Baker drew on her organizer experience to counsel numerous groups and causes. She died on her 83rd birthday in 1986.



A new book, "We Who Believe in Freedom: The Life and Times of Ella Baker," details Baker's civil rights contributions. The biography, written by Lea Williams and intended especially for middle and high school students, sells for $17 (softcover). To order, call 800-848-6224 or visit uncpress.org

Ella Baker in Atlantic City, N.J., site of the 1964 Democratic National Convention.

Have a laugh!

Q: Why does Santa have a garden?

A: So he can hoe, hoe, hoe!

Toothsome Treats

Looking for a quick and easy dessert recipe? These creamy sweets sport vivid holiday color (and kids love the individual portions). Find additional seasonal recipes and how-to videos at luckyleaf.com.

Mini Marbled Cherry Cheesecakes

- 18 chocolate cookies with white filling, such as Oreos
- 2 packages (8 ounces each) cream cheese, softened
- ⅓ cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 can (21 ounces) cherry filling

Heat oven to 350 degrees.

Line muffin tins with 18 paper liners. Place one chocolate cookie in the bottom of each paper liner.

In a mixing bowl, beat cream cheese, sugar, eggs and vanilla until light and fluffy. Fold in half of the fruit filling. ***Note:*** *You can substitute apple or blueberry filling, if desired.*

Fill each muffin liner about three-fourths full with mixture.

Bake 20 to 25 minutes, or until done. Cool. Top each cheesecake with one spoonful of remaining fruit filling.

Yield: 18 servings

Charlie's Dream

Eleven-year-old Charlie has been making the same secret wish since fourth grade. But when she is sent to NC's Blue Ridge Mountains to live with a family she barely knows, it seems unlikely her wish will ever come true. That is, until she meets Wishbone, a skinny dog who captures her heart, and Howard, a neighbor boy who proves surprising in many ways.

This new novel about a girl who unexpectedly learns the true meaning of family was written by award-winning author Barbara O'Connor of Asheville. Hardcover, $11.99 at barnesandnoble.com; softcover, $7.19; and Kindle, $5.67 at amazon.com. To learn more about the author, visit barbaraoconnor.com.

Bonding Tree Tradition

For many families, finding and cutting down a fresh tree at one of NC's many Christmas tree farms is a beloved tradition. In addition to picturesque scenery and the rich, fragrant aroma of real trees, the farm experience often includes tasty hot cocoa and fun activities such as hayrides. To find choose-and-cut farms, you can search by county or region at ncfarmfresh.com/farms.asp.

carolinacountry.com/extras
Check out a video from NC Christmas Tree Association for tips on caring for your fresh-cut tree.

I Remember

Memories and photos from our readers

The Water Picture

Growing up on a North Carolina farm was hard years ago. Our friend always says his family had all of the necessities in the '40s and '50s, but none of the extras. For instance, there were very few pictures on the walls. Money had to be spent elsewhere.

His parents did without some of the extras to make sure their children had more. When he became an adult, he wanted to show his appreciation for what they had done.

So, on special occasions like birthdays or Christmas, he tried to make sure his parents had special gifts. He would ask them what they wanted and make sure he bought whatever they asked for.

One year, he asked his mother what she would REALLY like to have. She said she really wanted a water picture. So, our friend drove to the nearest big town and began to look for a water picture. He went to several stores before he found exactly what he wanted.

The picture he found was a mountain scene. It had a waterfall cascading down the mountainside, into a pond. There were shadows and silhouettes in the pond. Around all the water was a large forest. The colors were all vibrant—almost intense. I could imagine the whole picture as our friend described it. I could almost feel the coolness of the water. This picture was such a beautiful and peaceful scene. Our friend knew his mother would be pleased.

It was a big picture. So, he wrapped it all carefully and went to give it to his mother.

Arriving there, he handed his mother the water picture. He noticed his mother seemed to have a puzzled look on her face.

After she unwrapped the water picture, she began to laugh and laugh. He wasn't sure what was so funny. He thought the picture was beautiful!

When she finally quit laughing, his mother explained. She wanted a water PITCHER, not a water PICTURE.

The next day, he went and bought his mother a tree-green colored pottery water pitcher.

To this day, the family still laughs. His father gave him the water PITCHER when his mother died. It is still one of his most treasured possessions!

Katie Martin, Danbury

Send Us Your Memories We love sharing photos and memories dear to our readers. Submit your photo, plus roughly 200 words that describe it, online or by mail with a self-addressed, stamped envelope if you want it returned (only one entry per household, per month). Include your name, mailing address, phone number or email address, and the name of your electric co-op. We retain reprint rights, and we'll pay $50 for those we publish. **Online:** carolinacountry.com/contact **U.S. Mail:** I Remember, Carolina Country, 3400 Sumner Blvd., Raleigh, NC 27616

The Yoders with Granddaddy Williamson

A Magical Tow Sack

"Tow sack" is a Southern term our Granddaddy J. Carr Williamson used to describe a burlap bag. On Christmas Eve at our home in Whiteville, we would assemble a hodgepodge of "treasures" from our dad's workshop and the hardware store. The eclectic collection included nails, empty berry cups, twine, as well as newspapers, pieces of wood and new clothing items. All were carefully wrapped in newsprint, put in a tow sack, then tied with string and loaded into the family car. Giggling with excitement, we headed to our Granddaddy's farm in Chadbourn to secretly hang the tow sack.

For some reason, on Christmas morning he always needed our help locating the bulging tow sack. As he perched on a stump, we gathered to watch him unwrap each present. With a smile, he told us the items he unwrapped were just what he had "been needing."

This tradition continued after Granddaddy's death in 1976 as we replicated it for our mom (Lois W. Yoder) with the help of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Reflecting on the merriment in our Granddad's eyes and his broad smile brings back memories of a simpler time when a tow sack was truly magical.

Louise Turbeville (of the Yoder Siblings), Wilmington
A member of Brunswick Electric

ADVERTISEMENT

Drug Companies Fear Release of the New AloeCure

Big Pharma stands to lose billions as doctors' recommend drug-free "health cocktail" that adjusts and corrects your body's health conditions.

by David Waxman
Seattle Washington:

Drug company execs are nervous. That's because the greatest health advance in decades has hit the streets. And analysts expect it to put a huge crimp in "Big Pharma" profits.

So what's all the fuss about? It's about a new ingredient that's changing the lives of people who use it. Some call it "the greatest discovery since penicillin"!

The name of the product is the AloeCure. It's not a drug. It's something completely different. And the product is available to anyone who wants it, at a reasonable price. But demands may force future prices to rise.

TOP DOC WARNS: DIGESTION DRUGS CAN CRIPPLE YOU!

Company spokesperson, Dr. Liza Leal; a leading integrative health specialist recommends AloeCure before she decides to prescribe any digestion drug. Especially after the FDA's stern warning about long-term use of drugs classified as proton pump inhibitors like **Prilosec®, Nexium®, and Prevacid®.** In a nutshell, the FDA statement warned people should avoid taking these digestion drugs for longer than three 14-day treatment periods because there is an increased risk of bone fractures. Many people take them daily and for decades.

Dr. Leal should know. Many patients come to her with bone and joint complaints and she does everything she can to help them. One way for digestion sufferers to help avoid possible risk of tragic joint and bone problems caused by overuse of digestion drugs is to take the AloeCure.

Analysts expect the AloeCure to put a huge crimp in "Big Pharma" profits.

The secret to AloeCure's "health adjusting" formula is scientifically tested Acemannan, a polysaccharide extracted from Aloe Vera. But not the same aloe vera that mom used to apply to your cuts, scrapes and burns. This is a perfect strain of aloe that is organically grown under very strict conditions. AloeCure is so powerful it begins to benefit your health the instant you take it. It soothes intestinal discomfort and you can avoid the possibility of bone and health damage caused by overuse of digestion drugs. We all know how well aloe works externally on cuts, scrapes and burns. But did you know Acemannan has many of other health benefits?...

HELPS THE IMMUNE SYSTEM TO CALM INFLAMMATION

According to a leading aloe research, when correctly processed for digesting, the Aloe plant has a powerful component for regulating your immune system called Acemannan. So whether it's damage that is physical, bacterial, chemical or autoimmune; the natural plant helps the body stay healthy.

RAPID ACID AND HEARTBURN NEUTRALIZER

Aloe has proved to have an astonishing effect on users who suffer with digestion problems like bouts of acid reflux, heartburn, cramping, gas and constipation because it acts as a natural acid buffer and soothes the digestive system. But new studies prove it does a whole lot more.

SIDE-STEP HEART CONCERNS

So you've been taking proton pump inhibitors (PPI's) for years and you feel just fine. In June of 2015 a major study shows that chronic PPI use increases the risk of heart attack in general population.

UNLEASH YOUR MEMORY

Studies show that your brain needs the healthy bacteria from your gut in order function at its best. Both low and high dosages of digestion drugs are proven to destroy that healthy bacteria and get in the way of brain function. So you're left with a sluggish, slow-to-react brain without a lot of room to store information. The acemannan used in AloeCure actually makes your gut healthier, so healthy bacteria flows freely to your brain so you think better, faster and with a larger capacity for memory.

Doctors call it "The greatest health discovery in decades!"

SLEEP LIKE A BABY

A night without sleep really damages your body. And continued lost sleep can lead to all sorts of health problems. But what you may not realize is the reason why you're not sleeping. Some call it "Ghost Reflux". A low-intensity form of acid reflux discomfort that quietly keeps you awake in the background. AloeCure helps digestion so you may find yourself sleeping through the night.

CELEBRITY HAIR, SKIN & NAILS

Certain antacids may greatly reduce your body's ability to break down and absorb calcium. Aloe delivers calcium as it aids in balancing your stomach acidity. The result? Thicker, healthier looking hair...more youthful looking skin... And nails so strong they may never break again.

SAVE YOUR KIDNEY

National and local news outlets are reporting Kidney Failure linked to PPI's. Your Kidney extracts waste from blood, balance body fluids, form urine, and aid in other important functions of the body. Without it your body would be overrun by deadly toxins. Aloe helps your kidney function properly. Studies suggest, if you started taking aloe today; you'd see a big difference in the way you feel.

GUARANTEED RESULTS OR DOUBLE YOUR MONEY BACK

Due to the incredible results people are reporting, AloeCure is being sold with an equally incredible guarantee.

"We can only offer this incredible guarantee because we are 100% certain this product will work for those who use it," Says Dr. Leal.

Here's how it works: Take the pill exactly as directed. You must see and feel remarkable improvements in your digestive health, your mental health, in your physical appearance, the amount inflammation you have throughout your body – even in your ability to fall asleep at night!

Otherwise, simply return the empty bottles with a short note about how you took the pills and followed the simple instructions and the company will send you...Double your money back!

HOW TO GET ALOECURE

This is the official nationwide release of the new AloeCure pill in the United States. And so, the company is offering our readers up to 3 FREE bottles with their order.

This special give-away is available for readers of this publication only. All you have to do is call TOLL-FREE **1-800-746-3210** and provide the operator with the Free Bottle Approval Code: JC025. The company will do the rest.

Important: Due to AloeCure's recent media exposure, phone lines are often busy. If you call and do not immediately get through, please be patient and call back.

THESE STATEMENTS HAVE NOT BEEN EVALUATED BY THE FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION. THIS PRODUCT IS NOT INTENDED TO DIAGNOSE, TREAT, CURE OR PREVENT ANY DISEASE

December events

Carriage Rides
Dec. 9–31, Hendersonville

Holiday Shoppe
Dec. 2, Chapel Hill

Mountains

Holiday Studio Tour
Meet artists, visit galleries
Dec. 1–3, Mitchell, Yancey counties
828-682-7215
toeriverarts.org

A Small Town Christmas
Dec. 1–3, Banner Elk
Candy cane hunt, storytelling
828-898-8395
bannerelk.com

Craft Fair
Art, toys, quilts
Dec. 2, Sparta
336-651-3251
lazybranch@skybest.com

Christmas Parade
Dec. 2, Burnsville
828-682-7413
exploreburnsville.com

Elfin' Around Christmas Show
Vendors, raffle
Dec. 9, Lenoir
828-215-0859
adamseventsnc.wix.com/adamseventsnc

A Charlie Brown Christmas
TV special comes to life
Dec. 14, Morganton
828-433-7469
commaonline.org

Old Fashioned Christmas
Reindeer rides, ice rink
Dec. 15–16, Taylorsville
828-632-2999
alexandercountyonline.com/applefestival

Annie Moses Band
Holiday chamber-pop music
Dec. 22, Franklin
866-273-4615
greatmountainmusic.com

A Merry Motown Christmas
Dancers, soul music
Dec. 16, Franklin
866-273-4615
greatmountainmusic.com

ONGOING

The Best Christmas Pageant Ever
Comedy about putting on a show
Through Dec. 17, Hendersonville
828-693-0731
flatrockplayhouse.org

A Flat Rock Playhouse Christmas
Holiday singing, dancing
Through Dec. 22, Flat Rock
828-693-0731
flatrockplayhouse.org

Carriage Rides
Dec. 9–31, Hendersonville
828-693-9708
visithendersonvillenc.org

Holiday Skating
On iceless rink
Dec. 19–Jan. 1, Hendersonville
828-768-4413
visithendersonvillenc.org

Piedmont

Holiday Extravaganza
Student, faculty performances
Dec. 1, Pembroke
910-521-6361
uncp.edu/gpac

White Christmas
Free Movie Fridays Series
Dec. 1, Roxboro
336-597-1709
personcounty.net

A Carolina Holiday
Traditional, holiday tunes
Dec. 2, Fayetteville
910-433-4690
fayettevillesymphony.org

Holiday Shoppe
Crafts, raffle
Dec. 2, Chapel Hill
919-929-2241
stmcsnc.org

Open House
Decorations, refreshments
Dec. 2, Seagrove
336-879-4145
thomaspottery.com

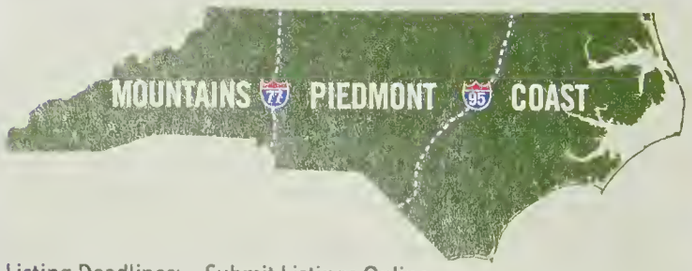
A Carolina Holiday Concert
Dec. 2, Fayetteville
910-433-4690
fayettevillesymphony.org

Jerry Allison's Christmas Show
Dancing solos, singing
Dec. 2, Liberty
336-622-3844
thelibertyshowcase.com

Christmas Festival
Bounce houses, Santa
Dec. 2, Four Oaks
919-963-4004
bit.ly/fb-4oakschristmas

Welcome to December Concert
Kenyan, American classical styles
Dec. 2, Lexington
336-250-0475
lexingtonchoralsociety.org

carolinacountry.com/calendar
See more events online with photos, descriptions, maps and directions.



Listing Deadlines:
For Feb.: Dec. 25
For Mar.: Feb. 25

Submit Listings Online:
carolinacountry.com/calendar
(No email or U.S. Mail.)

Hanukkah Festival
Dec. 10, Durham

If you know where this Carolina Country scene is, send your answer by December 6 with your name, address and the name of your electric cooperative.

Online: carolinacountry.com/where

By mail: Where in Carolina Country?
P.O. Box 27306
Raleigh, NC 27611

Multiple entries from the same person will be disqualified.

The winner, chosen at random and announced in our January issue, will receive $25.

Have a roadside gem you'd like to share? Submit a photo, plus a brief description and general location information, at carolinacountry.com/where.

November winner

The November Where Is This photo from Sandy and Frank Godzik features a privately owned covered bridge off Freeman Town Road, just west of Lake Lure. The red wooden structure leads to Stoney Creek Farm. Built about 25 years ago and refurbished in 2006, the bridge is a favorite photo op for seasonal tourists. It is one of several other covered bridges in Rutherford County, reports Godzik. Submitted answers ran neck-and-neck with the correct location and with a look-alike bridge in Cherokee County called Granny Squirrel. So many readers guessed the latter that a photo of this bridge is posted on our website (carolinacountry.com/where). The winning entry chosen at random from all the correct submissions came from Pat Wright-Dalton of Lake Lure, a Rutherford EMC member.

Come Home to Christmas
Tour of historic homes, properties
Dec. 2–3, Warrenton
252-204-9908
preservationwarrenton.com

1820s Christmas
At Edwards-Franklin House
Dec. 2–3, Mount Airy
336-325-2161
surryhistoricalsociety.org

Holiday Jubilee
Victorian caroling
Dec. 3, Fayetteville
910-486-1330
museumofthecapefear.ncdcr.gov

The Messiah
Composed by Handel
Dec. 3, Wadesboro
704-694-5179
Kharkey3@carolina.rr.com

Jingle on Main
Wagon rides, The Grinch
Dec. 7, Roxboro
336-322-2104
piedmontcc.edu/jingle

Behold: A Folk Christmas Cantata
Dec. 7–9, Fayetteville
910-420-4383
sweetteashakespeare.com

Robeson County Christmas
Dancers, singers, Santa
Dec. 7–10, Lumberton
910-738-4339
carolinaciviccenter.com

Christmas Carriage Parade
Horses, ponies
Dec. 9, Southern Pines
910-639-2359
moorecountydrivingclub.net

Holiday Open House
Pottery, refreshments
Dec. 9, Robbins
910-464-6228
fromthegrounduppots.com

Jimmy Fortune
Former Statler Brothers singer
Dec. 9, Liberty
336-622-3844
thelibertyshowcase.com

Hanukkah Festival
Family activities, music and food
Dec. 10, Durham
919-354-4936
levinjcc.org

A Christmas Carol
Dickens' classic ghost story
Dec. 15–17, Roxboro
336-597-1709
bit.ly/personcounty-christmascarol

Know Before You Go

In case something changes after Carolina Country goes to press, check information from the contact listed.

Cumberland Oratorio Singers
Christmas themed music
Dec. 16, Fayetteville
910-630-7153
singwithcos.org

ONGOING

The Art of Giving
Local artists' works
Through Dec. 31, Hillsborough
919-732-5001
hillsboroughgallery.com

Holiday Open House
Special events at pottery shops
Dec. 2–3, 9–10, 16–17 & 23, Seagrove
336-879-4145
discoverseagrove.com

Holiday Lights in the Garden
Synchronized show, s'mores
Dec. 8–30, Fayetteville
910-486-0221
capefearbg.org

Coast

Rocky Hock Opry Show
Christmas favorites
Dec. 1–2, Edenton
252-333-8567
visitedenton.com

Who Stole Father Christmas
Interactive murder mystery
Dec. 1–3, Oriental
252-249-0477
oldtheater.org/calendar

Christmas Parade
Dec. 2, Shallotte
910-754-4302
townofshallotte.org

Winter Fest
Dec. 2, Newport
252-223-4749
townofnewport.com

Christmas by the Sea Parade
Dec. 2, Oak Island
910-278-5518
ncbrunswick.com

Christmas Home Tour
Featuring Craftsman bungalows
Dec. 2, Enfield
252-445-2234
derpserves.org

Historic Homes Tour
Houses on British Cemetery Road
Dec. 2, Ocracoke
252-928-7375
ocracokepreservation.org

Christmas Open House
Performers, carriage rides
Dec. 3, Windsor
252-794-3140
hopeplantation.org

Christmas Candlelight Tour
Private homes
Dec. 8–9, Edenton
252-482-7800
ehcnc.org

Christmas Parade
Dec. 9, Farmville
252-753-6712
farmville-nc.com

Christmas Parade
Dec. 9, Greenville
252-329-4200
greenvillejaycees.com

Christmas Parade
Dec. 9, Bethel
252-818-0891
bethelnc.org

The Nutcracker Ballet
Dec. 9–10, Greenville

Festival & Parade
Crafts, dancers
Dec. 9, Leland
910-371-9921
ncbrunswick.com

Christmas Flotilla
Dec. 9, Southport
910-279-4616
ncbrunswick.com

The Nutcracker Ballet
Dec. 9–10, Greenville
800-328-2787
ecu.edu/cs-admin/tickets

Open House
At 1857 Octagon House
Dec. 10, Engelhard
252-926-2261
facebook.com/octagonhouse.nc

The Barefoot Movement
Bluegrass band
Dec. 14, Oriental
252-617-2125
pamlicomusic.org

Cookie Walk
Crafts, music
Dec. 16, New Bern
708-267-2672
Jeldred14@gmail.com

The Christmas Village
Hay rides, hot cider
Dec. 16, Shallotte
910-754-4302
townofshallotte.org

ONGOING

Winterfest
Home tours, tea party
Dec. 1–10, Southport
910-457-7927
ncbrunswick.com

A Christmas Carol: A New Musical
Dec. 1–16, New Bern
252-259-3057
rivertowneplayers.org

Christmas Cantata
For music scholarship
Dec. 3–10, Currituck
252-453-4540
kenmargie@centurylink.net

CAROLINA COUNTRY
scenes
Photo of the month

Silent Morning
November morning, the snow created a lovely picture of winter and the upcoming holiday season in front of our mountain home in Fines Creek.

Joanne Meyer, Clyde Haywood EMC

The Photo of the Month comes from those who scored an honorable mention from the judges in our 2017 photo contest ("Carolina Country Scenes," January 2017). See even more Photos of the Week on our website carolinacountry.com.

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Nickens Knows the Outdoors

Raleigh's Eddie Nickens is one of the most read outdoor writers in America

By Mike Zlotnicki

When it comes to hunting and fishing, there's little that Eddie Nickens of Raleigh hasn't done. Along the way T. Edward Nickens (as he's known to his readers) has parlayed his love for the outdoors into a successful and wide-ranging career.

In addition to being editor-at-large for Field & Stream magazine, Nickens has had bylines in Audubon, Garden & Gun, Smithsonian and National Geographic, among others. He's also hosted, co-produced and written for television, including "Heroes of Conservation" and "Total Outdoorsman Challenge." He compiled and edited four outdoors manuals, and his fifth, "The Total Redneck Manual," co-written with F&S Hunting Editor Will Brantley, was released last month. I recently had a chance to sit down with Eddie and ask him a few questions.

Paul Taggart

Tell me about the new book.
You look at every other book associated with rednecks out there and they're caricatures, they're comedies poking fun...and we thought that was just ridiculous. We wanted to celebrate the redneck and elevate the American redneck's status to where it ought to be. A redneck is someone who can do it and get it done. Hunting, fishing, camping, survival. We want to highlight what makes the redneck an American icon. The book is a celebration of self-sufficiency. I also helped out with Bob Timberlake's new book "Bob Timberlake's Letter to Home" that came out recently.

What are your favorite books?
"The Old Man and the Boy" would be one of them. I read it to my son Jack chapter by chapter when he was 8 or 9. He's now read it six times, probably. He was reading it on the plane on the way to Wyoming last week. Last month I had the opportunity to hunt the same marshes where Robert Ruark hunted marsh hens. I went to the Old Man's home where Ruark spent his summers. Got to wear his shooting glasses, which was a thrill. It takes a certain level of maturity to appreciate that book because it was written at...a different time. It is the classic example of hunting and fishing as a metaphor for life.

What is your favorite place in the NC mountains? How about along the coast?
Can it be an unnamed creek? It's in the Pisgah National Forest. It's a creek I may never fish again, because I wasn't sure I was going to get out of it alive the last time I fished it. I've fished it three times. The first time was hard, the second time was stupid hard; I wasn't sure I was going to go back, and the third time reminded me about the second time. It's one of the most remote trout streams we have. Trail-less at its uppermost reaches. Very, very steep. It's where Jack first developed his love for fly-fishing.

The coastal place would have to be the Cape Lookout/Core Sound area. Have a place down there, have history down there. I helped the Core Sound Waterfowl Museum when they were first being developed.

Do you have a favorite North Carolina activity?
It would be to duck hunt a beaver swamp, for sure.

What issue are you most concerned about in the outdoors?
Access to wild places. It's not going to get any easier, and we have to be very strategic figuring out how future generations are going to have a chance at having experiences that we have now.

What is your favorite game fish or animal to eat?
That answer will change from time to time, but right now it's pronghorn antelope because I just put two in my freezer last week.

What do you want for Christmas?
The honest answer, and it's fantasy, is time. Especially this time of the year. I want three Novembers under the tree. Three empty Novembers. I've traveled here, there, yonder...I want three Novembers at home.

Mike Zlotnicki is associate editor at Wildlife in North Carolina magazine. He lives in Garner with his wife, three daughters and two German shorthaired pointers.

Bigger Buttons

"My friends all hate their cell phones... I love mine!" Here's why.

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"I had to get my son to program it." Your Jitterbug Flip setup process is simple. We'll even program it with your favorite numbers.

"What if I don't remember a number?" Friendly, helpful Personal Operators are available 24 hours a day and will even greet you by name when you call.

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"My cell phone company wants to lock me in a two-year contract!" Not with the Jitterbug Flip. There are no contracts to sign and no cancellation fees.

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Voice Dial	FREE	FREE
Nationwide Coverage	YES	YES
30-Day Return Policy[2]	YES	YES

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"My phone's battery only lasts a short time." Unlike most cell phones that need to be recharged every day, the Jitterbug Flip was designed with a long-lasting battery, so you won't have to worry about running out of power.

"Many phones have features that are rarely needed and hard to use!" The Jitterbug Flip contains easy-to-use features that are meaningful to you. A built-in camera makes it easy and fun for you to capture and share your favorite memories. And a flashlight with a built-in magnifier helps you see in dimly lit areas. The Jitterbug Flip has all the features you need.

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Ductless Heat Pumps

Heat and cool your home without blowing your budget

By Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen

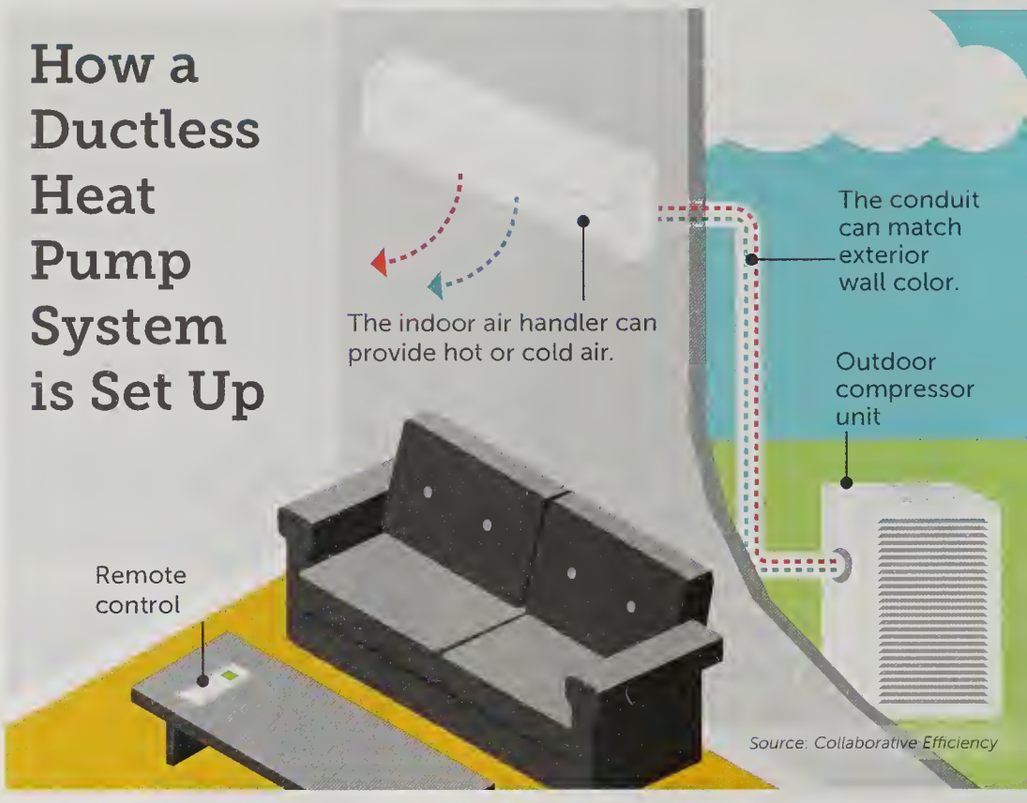
In the September issue, we discussed air source heat pumps ("Benefits of Air Source Heat Pumps," page 34), which move air through a duct system. Another heat pump option works similarly, but without ducts. These ductless systems are often called "mini-split" heat pumps ("mini" because they are suitable for conditioning smaller areas, and "split" because they consist of a separate outside compressor and one or more inside air-handling units).

Mini-split ductless heat pumps are becoming more popular for good reason. They can heat efficiently even when winter temperatures drop below the freezing point, and they are an economical and energy efficient replacement for window AC units.

Ductless heat pumps are often installed as the primary heating source and paired with a backup system that kicks in when outside temperatures are extremely cold. Heat pumps work harder as the outside air temperature drops, but combining the heat pump with a backup heating system solves that problem.

Ductless heat pump systems could be an ideal solution if your home doesn't have a duct system. They have also been shown to be effective in manufactured homes (see "Improving Energy Efficiency with Mini-Splits," August 2016, page 38). If your existing ductwork is in poor condition, installing a ductless heat pump may be more practical or less expensive than repairing, sealing and insulating ducts.

A ductless heat pump has two main components: the outdoor compressor and the indoor air handler. Coolant and electrical lines run through a conduit from the compressor outside the home through the wall to the inside air handler(s).


How a Ductless Heat Pump System is Set Up
The indoor air handler can provide hot or cold air.
The conduit can match exterior wall color.
Outdoor compressor unit
Remote control
Source: Collaborative Efficiency

Ductless heat pumps can be configured in different ways. A common approach that could deliver the most value is to provide heating and cooling to one large zone in the home by using a single compressor and a single air handler. Or you could use one compressor to power as many as four inside air handlers, each with its own thermostat. A home could even have more than one outside compressor.

Ductless heat pumps are often a great solution and could reduce heating costs considerably if replacing a much more energy intensive system like baseboard heaters, which are an electric resistance system. As you explore this option it would be wise to consider:

- What are the other investments you could make to reduce your energy costs or improve comfort? Is the ductless heat pump the best option? Contact your electric cooperative and ask about a thorough energy audit of your home to help answer these questions.
- Are rebates offered by your electric co-op?
- What is the best size and efficiency level for a ductless heat pump in your situation?
- Are there contractors in your area with experience installing ductless heat pumps? Visit energystar.gov for tips on hiring contractors.

This column was co-written by Pat Keegan and Brad Thiessen of Collaborative Efficiency. Visit carolinacountry.com/your-energy for more ideas on energy efficiency.

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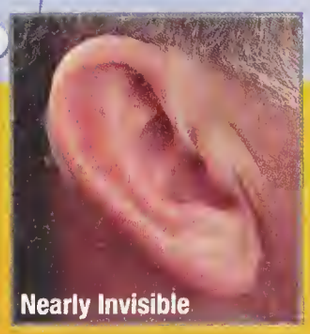

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Foaming a Crawl Space

By Hannah McKenzie

Q: I live in an old home that was built without insulation. I have already sealed all of the holes in my attic and added insulation, which makes a big difference in reducing drafts in the winter and humidity in the summer. My next goal is to insulate under the floors, and spray foam looks like a great option. What do you think?

A: Upgrading a home can be so frustrating when there seem to be a multitude of methods and a huge range of prices for solving a problem. While spray foam can be an excellent choice versus batt or blown insulation, it is not a silver bullet. And in North Carolina, insulating a floor above a crawl space makes less of an impact on energy savings and improving comfort than what you've already done in the attic.

Spray foam options

Spray foam insulation is mixed at the job site using two chemical mixtures and then sprayed in place by professionals who are covered head to toe with protective suits. There are two basic types of spray foam insulation, and both provide air sealing and insulating qualities in one product.

Open-cell foam is commonly used in walls and ceilings of new North Carolina homes due to our mild climate and its lower cost than closed-cell foam. "Open" means it allows moisture transfer while restricting air transfer.

Closed-cell foam is less frequently used due to its higher cost, but it insulates more per inch of thickness than open-cell foam because it limits both moisture and air transfer. Another benefit is the reduced thickness helps the foam stick (despite gravity) when sprayed on challenging surfaces like under-roof sheathing or crawl space walls.

Industry experts recommend installing spray foam insulation in the floor system only if a crawl space is controlled to be extraordinarily dry (see "Closing the Crawl Space," November 2017, page 36).

Another option, shared at crawlspaces.org, is to have rigid foam board or closed-cell spray foam insulating the foundation walls with no additional insulation in the floor system. Both materials can achieve the same outcome, so be sure to investigate contractor options, as price and quality can vary in your area. In an existing crawl space, spray foam materials and labor may be less expensive than rigid foam board insulation, which can be challenging to maneuver and install under an existing home.

Safety measures

One concern with products such as spray foam is volatile organic compounds (VOCs) off-gassing, meaning the smelly chemicals in the air may cause headaches, nosebleeds or other health concerns. The American Chemistry Council recommends keeping the home's heating and cooling system off and sealed for 24 hours after spray foam installation to let the foam cure and off-gas. In rare cases, an improperly mixed or installed spray foam will cause irreparable damage to a home, which is why choosing a reputable installer is extremely important.

As with all home improvement projects, getting multiple detailed quotes and finding a good contractor are keys to success, particularly when prices can range from $2,000 to $10,000 for a 2,000-square-foot house. Hearing from customers who have gone through the experience before is another way to ensure your home receives the caliber of work it deserves.

Hannah McKenzie is a residential building science consultant for Advanced Energy in Raleigh.

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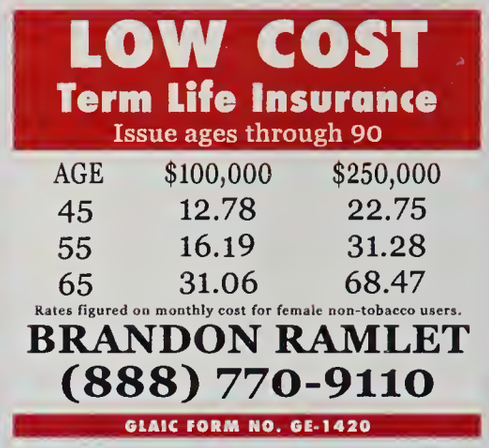
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Crab Rangoon Stuffed Mushrooms

If you love Crab Rangoon and mushrooms, you'll surely enjoy this twist for a holiday appetizer...and your guests will too!

- 1 pound white button mushrooms, stems removed
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 8 ounces garden vegetable cream cheese, softened
- ½ lb. crabmeat
- 5–6 green scallions, minced (white and green parts)
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 2 teaspoons soy sauce
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- 6 wonton wrappers
- Oil to fry wrappers

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Toss mushroom caps with oil to lightly moisten. Sprinkle with salt.

Combine cream cheese, crab, half the scallions, sauces and garlic powder. Spoon into mushroom caps. Place onto baking pan and bake 15–18 minutes.

While mushrooms are cooking, quickly fry wonton skins in hot oil, about 2 minutes. Drain and crumble. Remove mushrooms from oven, scatter with wonton crumbs and remaining scallion. Serve immediately.

Yield: About 3 dozen mushrooms

carolinacountry.com/recipes
Discover 5 easy ways to use the extra wonton wrappers from this recipe.

From Your Kitchen

Swiss Chocolate Cake

- 1 box Swiss chocolate cake mix
- 1 small box instant vanilla pudding
- 3 eggs
- 1½ cups milk
- ¾ cup oil
- Baking spray with flour

Frosting

- 1 (8-ounce) package cream cheese
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 (12-ounce) container Cool Whip
- 2 large Hershey bars, grated
- 1 cup pecans, finely chopped

Preheat oven to 300 degrees.

Spray three 9-inch round cake pans with baking spray with flour. Mix ingredients together well and pour into cake pans. Bake for 20–25 minutes or until toothpick comes out clean.

For frosting: Mix cream cheese and sugar together. Add Cool Whip to this mixture and then the Hershey bars and pecans. Spread over and between layers of cooled cake.

Recipe courtesy of Beverly Sumner, Garland, a member of Four County EMC

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—Jenny Lloyd, recipes editor

Glazed Steak Bites with Horseradish Whipped Cream

Enjoy this simple addition to your holiday appetizer menu. Your crowd will love these flavorful steak bites, as is, or with a dollop of snazzy whipped cream on top!

- 4 pounds lean beef (rib eye, filet or sirloin) cut in ¾″ cubes
- 4 tablespoons oil
- 2 tablespoons butter

Marinade

- ½ cup olive oil
- ½ cup honey
- ½ cup balsamic vinegar
- ¼ cup dark brown sugar
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon black pepper

Horseradish Whipped Cream

- 1 cup whipping cream
- 3 tablespoons horseradish
- 1 tablespoon mayonnaise
- Freshly ground black pepper
- Pinch of sugar
- Minced chives

Combine marinade ingredients. Put beef into zippered bag. Pour marinade over, seal and toss to coat. Marinate, refrigerated, 30 minutes to overnight.

Heat half the oil and butter in cast iron skillet to medium-high heat. Add steak pieces, making sure not to crowd (cook in batches adding oil and butter as needed). Sear until "crust" forms.

Note: Be careful not to overcook as the meat will continue cooking after removing from heat.

For whipped cream: Whip cream until stiff peaks form. Fold in remaining ingredients. Garnish with chives. Serve with steak bites.

Yield: About 40 pieces

Unless otherwise noted, recipes on this page are from Wendy Perry, a culinary adventurist specializing in NC-made food products and small NC farms.

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